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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASMARA 000875

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TAGS: PREL KPKO SU ER

SUBJECT: SLA-UNITY'S SHARIF HARIR SPEAKS ON SIRTE AND THE FUTURE

Classified By: CDA Jennifer A. McIntyre, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a November 9 meeting with Poloff, Sudan Liberation Army-Unity (SLA) Unity) Head for Negotiations Sharif Harir expressed his commitment to engaging in peace negotiations for Darfur and critiqued the process leading up to the Sirte talks. Harir said internal problems within SLA-Unity had been caused by a lack of understanding by certain members, especially Abdallah Yehia, of their roles and responsibilities. He highlighted the need for SLA-Unity political leaders to meet in Darfur with the party's supporters to resolve differences. Harir offered his assessment of various rebel leaders, commenting that some who had attended Sirte had little support on the ground. He asked that the international community support SLA-Unity's efforts to stay united and encourage the Darfur groups to create lasting, and meaningful, alliances between themselves. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Harir expressed frustration at the process leading up to the Sirte meetings (which he did not attend, stating that the UN/AU's system for issuing invitations, the multiple meetings and the selection of Libya as the venue all contributed to greater division between the different rebel groups. Harir stated that by recognizing any Darfurian "who speaks a little English and has a Thuraya satellite phone," the UN/AU had encouraged some groups to split into multiple factions in order to improve their chances of "getting a Land Cruiser and a bigger piece of the cake." The selection of Libya, and the Libyans subsequent maneuverings to buy off Darfur leaders such as Abdallah Yehia, also negatively impacted the process. He added that Qaddafi's opening comments, i.e. that the Darfurians were "fighting over a camel", were unhelpful and underlined why Libya was the wrong venue for talks.

¶3. (C) Harir acknowledged internal problems within SLA-Unity and asked for international community support of the group's efforts to resolve its differences. (NOTE: Harir did not ask for resources or financial support, but rather recognition of the need for SLA-Unity to work through its internal problems and the time ad political space to do so. End Note.) He ascribed the internal discord to Abdallah Yehia's failure to understand clearly his role as the leader of SLA-Unity, and to Yehia's behavior in the months leading up to the Sirte

talks. Harir stated that Yehia's long stay in Libya, and his agreements with the Libyans before Sirte, did not have the full support of the SLA-Unity commanders and troops. He also claimed the Libyans had prevented his travel to Darfur prior to the Sirte meetings in order to forestall such consultations with the SLA-Unity commanders. According to Harir, the Chadians had delayed, and then refused him transit permission to travel to Darfur. In explanation, the Chadians alluded to meetings with Libyan officials and told him the issue "was complicated." Harir said the SLA-Unity commanders are insisting again that Harir return to the field and have refused to let Yehia depart Darfur until these issues are resolved. (Note: Harir departed Eritrea on November 10 and traveled via Egypt to Darfur. End Note.)

¶4. (C) Once in Darfur Harir planned to: work toward resolution of SLA-Unity's internal issues, strengthen the SLA-Unity's political program and build stronger alliances with other Darfurian groups. He said that building allegiances with the Arab groups was particularly critical at this time, in order to help disarm the janjaweed militias. Harir expressed his commitment to peace in Darfur and told Poloff he would participate in UN/AU negotiations, even in Libya, once SLA-Unity resolves its differences. Harir suggested Chad might provide a better venue than Libya for continuing talks, because of its proximity to Darfur. He also mentioned Eritrea as a venue option. Although the logistics would be more difficult, in his view the Eritreans would be more supportive of the UN/AU process than Libya. South Africa was another viable venue for negotiations; Egypt was not.

¶5. (C) Harir refuted claims that the SLA-Unity has agreed to negotiate with SLA-Khamees Abdallah, the SLA/G-19 and others

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as a block. Commenting that SLA-Unity remains the largest and strongest force in Darfur, he added that SLA-Khamees Abdallah also commands a strong force. Harir noted that Khamees' history as Abdulwahid's deputy, the support and respect he receives from his fellow Masalit tribesman, and his skill as a politician make him an important player in bringing peace to Darfur. As for other Darfurian figures, Harir said that Adam Bakhit now has little to no actual support or assets on the ground in Darfur, aside from a couple of Land Cruisers and a Thuraya phone courtesy of high-ranking relatives in the Chadian army. With regards to Abdulwahid, he noted that Furs are also represented in other rebel groups. He said that the general assumption that all Furs support Abdulwahid was mistaken. Dismissing many of those who participated in Sirte as bit players with little support on the ground, Harir concluded, "you can't stop the war by inking a paper with those in Sirte, because they don't control the armies."

¶6. (C) Comment: Clearly pro-Eritrean, Harir denies allegations that he is "in the pocket of the Eritreans," although he freely states this belief that they are the "most strategic thinkers in the region." Notwithstanding the gossipy tone of Harir's observations about other Darfurians, particularly those he discounts, Harir himself has proven to be a reliable source of information in Asmara on the shifting alliances within the SLM/SLA groupings and appears sincere in his intention to continue engaging with the UN/AU process, despite his expressed reservations. End Comment.

MCINTYRE